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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BO](#)  
SUBJECT: UCP UNHAPPY WITH COALITION

REF: MINSK 390

Classified By: BY CHARGE CONSTANCE PHILIPOT

11. (C) Summary: On April 17, United Civic Party (UCP) deputy Jaroslav Romanchuk in a meeting with Poloff expressed his frustration with the activities and organization of the opposition's main coalition. Claiming to speak for his party, Romanchuk said the UCP presented a proposal to reform the opposition coalition, but this was met with hostility from much of the rest of the coalition. Romanchuk denied the UCP is attempting to place its own leader, Anatoly Lebedko, as head of the opposition, but he did deride Aleksandr Milinkevich for not exhibiting leadership. Although frustrated with the coalition, the UCP is seeking to reform the structure, not destroy it. Given the intense internal debates, the coalition seems ill prepared to unite anti-regime activists and advance democracy in Belarus. End Summary.

Coalition Had No Plan  
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12. (C) Romanchuk complained to Poloff at length that the coalition's biggest failing during the recent presidential elections was not having any plan of what to do once polls closed. He claimed that Milinkevich and his election headquarters were caught by surprise when thousands of people took to the streets to protest, and did not know how to respond. Romanchuk stated the UCP and several youth groups had tried to engage the coalition's Political Council (its executive committee) in advance to plan for demonstrations, but were rebuked. He said that the Belarusian Popular Front's (BPF) deputy, Viktor Ivashkevich, was in charge of coalition logistics and demonstration planning. However, Ivashkevich refused to work with youth groups or with the rival opposition coalition headed by Aleksandr Kozulin. Ivashkevich is now in charge of mobilization for the planned April 26 Chernobyl demonstration, the coalition's next big event. Romanchuk feared that because Ivashkevich is again refusing to work with youth groups, turn-out will be lower than it could have been otherwise and will be limited to those who "self-mobilize."

13. (C) When asked, Romanchuk admitted that the coalition also has not started even talking about any plans or strategies to contest local elections, which could be held as early as October.

## Need a New Congress to Promote Change

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¶4. (C) Romanchuk stated that the UCP is unhappy with the cumbersome way in which the coalition operates. As an example, he said that the coalition's excessive bureaucracy prevented them from submitting Milinkevich's platform for free printing in state newspapers, even though the platform was prepared well in advance. The UCP is also unhappy that some parties, such as the Women's Party Nadezhda and the Party of Freedom and Progress, which played no role at all during the election campaign, continue to have an equal vote in the coalition while other more active groups are excluded. Romanchuk said the UCP wants the coalition to hold a new Congress of Democratic Forces in order to:

- Reshape the cumbersome Political Council;
- Integrate active youth groups, Kozulin's coalition and other opposition forces into the coalition;
- Decide on the formation and goals of the new opposition "movement;"
- Praise the "heroes of the square," those who protested in the tent city, as a means of bringing them into the coalition;
- Streamline the bureaucracy.

¶5. (C) The UCP presented a written proposal for reform to the rest of the coalition. The UCP plan proposes holding a new congress, would do away with the election headquarters (which Romanchuk claimed Milinkevich's wife, Inna Kulei, is trying to turn into a new human rights group), would invite Kozulin, his Social-Democratic party, and several active youth groups into the coalition, and would try to lure various opposition personalities into the coalition. Romanchuk argued that the coalition needs to bring in people such as former MP Valery Frolov, academic Vladimir Kolas, former MP Vladimir Parfenovich, and former Speaker of Parliament Aleksandr Voitovich. Bringing them into the coalition with paid salaries, Romanchuk stated, would make them members of the team and prevent them from plotting against the coalition. They might even be able to attract supporters from their respective areas of expertise.

¶6. (C) Romanchuk complained that most of the rest of the coalition is attacking them for even proposing reforms. In most cases the UCP is accused of wanting to replace Milinkevich with Lebedko. Romanchuk said this is the usual coalition scenario: the UCP presents a written, concrete proposal, and the rest, who have nothing more than vague ideas on what they want to do, resist. He hopes that Milinkevich, Lebedko and Kalyakin can finally hold a private meeting to clear the air between them, and that other groups would present their visions of the future so the coalition have something concrete to discuss.

## Stupid to Replace Milinkevich, Sort of

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¶7. (C) Romanchuk claimed that much of the rest of the coalition is accusing the UCP of only wanting change so that Lebedko can replace Milinkevich as head of the movement. He dismissed those who are spreading this rumor as "BKGB provocateurs" and said it would be "stupid" to replace Milinkevich. Romanchuk said that Milinkevich has high name recognition, and should remain nominally at the head of the coalition for now. However, he added that the October 2005 congress only elected Milinkevich as the single coalition presidential candidate, so it is unclear what his role in the coalition should be now. The BPF wants him to remain head. (Note: During an April 14 meeting with Pol/Econ Chief, BPF deputy Ales Yanukevich repeatedly noted that every member of the Political Committee, except Lebedko, already expressed their strong support for Milinkevich's continued leadership of the coalition.)

¶8. (C) Romanchuk complained that Milinkevich is not exhibiting any true leadership, which is weakening the

opposition as a whole. Romanchuk claimed that at an April 13 meeting of the Political Council in Vilnius on the future activities of the coalition, Milinkevich was present but did not even speak. Warming to his subject, he accused Milinkevich of being "cowardly, controlled by Inna (Kulei, his wife), and has lost the respect of the youth," for failing to support their continued demonstrations against the falsified elections. (Note: In a separate meeting with Ambassador the same day, Kulei denied influencing Milinkevich's decision to break his agreement with Kozulin over the tent city on October Square and maintained that her husband makes his own decisions.)

¶9. (C) The UCP is proposing that the coalition have a rotating chairmanship, shared between the leading members of the unified opposition, such as Milinkevich, Kozulin, Lebedko, Kalyakin and Vyachorka. Romanchuk then said that the activities of these various leaders over the next two to three years would show who is the rightful leader of the coalition. He indicated that he expects Lebedko to be this leader, and stressed that Lebedko is trying to work with youth groups now to bring them into the coalition and to mobilize them for the April 26 demonstration.

How Much of Politics is Personal?  
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¶10. (C) At several points in the discussion Romanchuk made it clear that Lebedko feels he was ignored during the campaign. Lebedko, who lost to Milinkevich at the October congress by just eight votes, was supposed to have met weekly with Milinkevich and Sergey Kalyakin, the other potential single candidate. Romanchuk claimed not a single one of those meetings occurred. He also said that Lebedko and the UCP tried many times before the election to get the leadership and the Political Council to plan post-election strategies, but were continually rebuffed. Romanchuk maintained that the BPF is against any changes to the coalition because its senior leaders, particularly BPF chair Vintsuk Vyachorka and deputy Ales Yanukevich, are already in positions close to Milinkevich.

What Worked in the Campaign  
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¶11. (C) When asked what worked and what did not in the coalition during the election campaign, Romanchuk replied that Milinkevich's written "vision" and platform were successful, and he acknowledged the Lithuanian government for printing 20,000 copies of the platform. He also thanked the Lithuanians for providing the initial funding for the tent city protest (he claimed that the Lithuanian MFA's Renatas Juskas arranged the resources for the first tents). He also praised cooperation with some entrepreneur groups during the campaign and subsequent protests. On the contrary, he criticized some youth groups, such as Khopits and Zubr, for being ineffective and for spreading too many "meaningless" slogans. Romanchuk also criticized Ivashkevich for failing to adequately plan the demonstrations and the UCP's own deputy Aleksandr Dobrovolsky, who did a poor job in charge of public relations for the campaign. (Note: We heard similar criticism of Dobrovolsky's performance from several civil society leaders.)

Comment  
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¶12. (C) Romanchuk claimed to be speaking on behalf of his party, and said that Lebedko had asked him to present this message at the April 13 Political Council meeting in Vilnius. Post heard some of these same criticisms and ideas from another UCP deputy, Ludmila Gryaznova, on April 4 (reftel). Post has heard from several sources that the UCP is not happy with the current state of the coalition, but is not likely to break away. Even our UCP interlocutors stress they want to

reform, not destroy, the opposition coalition. However, they face serious resistance from the BPF (facing its own internal power struggle) in particular. The coalition will not likely split in the near future, but it remains encumbered by infighting and lack of organization. Milinkevich must take immediate action to address the concerns of rival factions and move the coalition forward, or he will remain leader of democratic forces united in name only.

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